

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. In a method of providing products from a vendor to a customer, the steps of:  
providing an indication from the customer to the vendor of an product that the customer  
5 wishes to purchase from the vendor,  
providing an indication from the vendor to the customer of the availability of the product  
at the vendor,  
providing an order from the customer to the vendor for the purchase of units of the  
product by the customer from the vendor,  
10 providing an indication from the customer to the vendor of a prompt delivery of first  
particular units of the ordered product by the vendor to the customer, and  
providing an indication from the customer to the vendor of a delayed delivery of second  
particular units of the ordered product by the vendor to the customer.
- 15 2. In a method as set forth in claim 1, the step of:  
providing an indication from the customer to the vendor of the date and time for the  
delayed delivery of the second particular units of the offered product by the vendor to the  
customer.
- 20 3. In a method as set forth in claim 1, the steps of:  
providing at the vendor a record of the indication from the customer to the vendor of the  
prompt delivery of the first particular units of the ordered product by the vendor to the customer,  
and

providing at the vendor a record of the indication from the customer to the vendor of the delayed delivery of the second particular units of the ordered product by the vendor to the customer.

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4. In a method as set forth in claim 2, the steps of:

providing at the vendor a record of the indication from the customer to the vendor of the prompt delivery of the first particular units of the ordered product by the vendor to the customer, and

10 providing at the vendor a record of the indication from the customer to the vendor of the date and time for the delayed delivery of the second particular units of the offered product by the vendor to the customer.

5. In a method as set forth in claim 2, the steps of:

15 providing for the shipment by the vendor to the customer of the first particular units of the ordered product promptly after the order by the customer to the vendor of the first particular units of the ordered product, and

providing for the shipment by the vendor to the customer of the second particular units of the ordered product at the date and time indicated by the customer to the vendor for the  
20 delivery by the vendor to the customer of the second particular units of the ordered product.

6. In a method as set forth in claim 1,  
providing an indication from the vendor that it does not have an inventory of the product  
when it receives the indication from the customer that the customer wishes to purchase the  
product from the vendor, and  
5 discontinuing any further steps by the vendor when the vendor indicates that it does not  
have the product in inventory.

7. In a method of providing products by a vendor to a customer, the steps at the  
customer of:  
10 receiving an order from a customer of units of a product,  
forwarding the order for the units of the product to the vendor,  
indicating to the vendor in connection with the order, whether the units of the product are  
to be shipped by the vendor promptly to the customer or are to be shipped by the vendor to the  
customer at a subsequent date,  
15 if the units of the product are to be shipped by the vendor to the customer at a subsequent  
date, indicating to the vendor the date on which the units of the product are to be shipped by the  
vendor to the customer.

8. In a method as set forth in claim 7, the steps at the customer of:  
20 initially determining whether branch offices of the customer have the units of the  
product,  
obtaining the units of the product from the branch offices for submission to the customer  
without ordering the products of the product from the vendor.

9. In a method as set forth in claim 7, the steps at the customer of:  
initially determining whether the vendor has the units of the product in stock, and

ordering the units of the product from the vendor if the vendor has the units of the  
5 product in stock.

10. In a method as set forth in claim 7, the steps at the customer of:  
subsequently inquiring at the vendor as to the status of the order at the vendor relating to  
the units of the product, and  
10 receiving from the vendor information relating to the status of the order at the vendor of  
the units of the product.

11. In a method as set forth in claim 9, the steps at the customer of:  
specifying to the vendor whether or not the units of the product are to be delivered  
15 promptly by the vendor to the customer,  
if the units of the product are not to be delivered promptly by the vendor to the customer,  
specifying to the vendor the date on which the units of the product are to be delivered by the  
vendor to the customer.

20 12. In a method as set forth in claim 9, the step at the customer of:  
initially determining whether branch offices of the customer have the units of the  
product,

obtaining the units of the product from the branch offices for submission to the customer without ordering the units of the product from the vendor, and

subsequently inquiring at the vendor as to the status of the order at the vendor relating to the units of the product, and

5 receiving from the vendor information relating to the status of the order at the vendor of the units of the product.

13. In a method of providing a product by a vendor to a customer, the steps at the customer of:

10 receiving an order for units of the product from a customer,

determining from the vendor that the vendor has inventory to fulfill the order,

if the vendor indicates to the customer that the vendor has the inventory to fill the order, transmitting the order to the vendor for the units of the product, the transmission from the customer to the vendor including an indication of whether the order is to be fulfilled by the

15 vendor promptly or at some future specified time, and

thereafter transmitting to the vendor requests to obtain the status of the order and other orders for units of the product, and

receiving from the vendor status reports relating to the prior or future fulfillment of the order and the other orders.

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14. In a method as set forth in claim 13, the steps at the customer of :

initially determining from the branches of the customer whether the branches have units of the product to fulfill the order of the customer, and

if the branches have units of the product to fulfill the order of the customer, fulfilling the order of the customer from the inventory of the customer at the branch offices of the customer at the branch offices of the customer without determining from the vendor whether the vendor has inventory of the product to fulfill the order of the customer.

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15. In a method as set forth in claim 14, the step at the customer of:  
indicating to the vendor the identity of the customer in connection with the order from the customer to the vendor for the units of the product.

10 16. In a method of providing a product by a vendor to a customer, the steps at the customer of:

receiving an order for units of the product from a customer,

determining from branch offices of the customer if the branch offices have units of the product to fulfill the order from the purchaser,

15 if the branch offices of the customer have units of the product to fulfill the order of the customer, obtaining units of the product to fulfill the order of the customer,

if the branch offices of the customer do not have units of the product to fulfill the order of the customer, determining if the vendor has units of the product to fulfill the order of the customer, and

20 if the vendor has units of the product to fulfill the order of the customer, placing an order with the vendor for the units of the product ordered by the customer.

17. In a method as set forth in claim 16, the step at the customer of:  
specifying to the vendor whether the delivery of the order by the vendor to the customer  
is to be prompt or is to occur at a subsequent specified date.

5 18. In a method as set forth in claim 17, the step at the customer of:  
thereafter requesting the status of the order when the order is to be fulfilled by the vendor  
at the subsequent specified time.

10 19. In a method of providing products from a vendor to a customer, the steps at  
the vendor of:  
receiving an order from the customer for units of the product, the order indicating  
whether the units of the product are to be delivered promptly by the vendor to the customer, and  
if not, the date for the delivery of the units of the product by the vendor to the customer, and  
entering, into a database at the vendor, the order including the customer, the quantity of  
15 units in the order and the date of the shipment of the order to the customer.

20. In a method as set forth in claim 19, the step at the vendor of:  
shipping the units of the product to the customer on the date specified by the customer in  
the order.

20 21. In a method as set forth in claim 19, the step at the vendor of:  
indicating to the customer the status of the orders in accordance with requests from the  
customer.

22. In a method as set forth in claim 19, the step at the vendor of:  
recording into the data base at the vendor the identity of the customer at the time that the  
order is entered into the database.

5 23. In a method of providing products from a vendor to a customer, the steps of:  
providing an order from the customer to the vendor for units of the product,  
providing an indication with the order as to whether the units of the product are to be  
delivered promptly or on some specified date in the future,  
recording the order and the delivery date of the order in a database at the vendor, and  
10 providing updates to the customer from the database relating to the status of the order for  
the units of the product.

24. In a method as set forth in claim 23, the step of:  
providing for the delivery by the vendor to the customer of the units of the product at the  
15 date indicated by the customer in the order to the vendor.

25. In a method as set forth in claim 23, the step of:  
initially determining whether branch offices of the customer have the units of the product,  
providing at the customer for the delivery of the units of the product to the customer from  
20 the branch offices of the customer when the branch offices have the units, and  
providing the order from the customer to the vendor for the units of the product when the  
branch offices of the customer do not have the units of the product.



26. In a method as set forth in claim 23, the steps of:

initially providing a determination by the customer from the vendor as to whether the vendor has the units of the product in its inventory, and

providing for the order from the customer to the vendor for the units of the product when

5 the customer determines from the vendor that the vendor has the units of the product in its inventory.

27. In a method as set forth in claim 25, the steps of:

when the branch offices of the customer do not have the units of the product, providing a

10 determination by the customer from the vendor as to whether the vendor has the units of the product in its inventory,

providing for the order from the customer to the vendor for the units of the product when

the customer determines from the vendor that the vendor has the units of the product in its inventory, and

15 providing for the delivery by the vendor to the customer of the units of the product at the date indicated by the customer in the order to the vendor.

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